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NAVAL FORCES:  
VALUABLE BEYOND THE SUM OF THEIR PARTS

by

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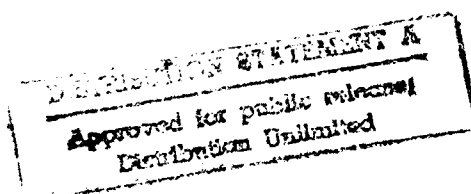
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The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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## **Abstract of**

### **NAVAL FORCES: VALUABLE BEYOND THE SUM OF THEIR PARTS**

Naval forces offer unique capabilities and unparalleled flexibility to our national decision makers and operational commanders. An analysis of their capabilities is conducted to highlight the versatility and value that naval forces offer due to their expeditionary nature. Naval surface and amphibious forces are examined in order to identify the range of operations that they can conduct. Capabilities, limitations, and the inherent flexibility of naval surface and amphibious forces are examined. Current U.S. National military Strategy emphasizes forward presence and crisis response. This will expand the naval force's traditional role as the force of choice for forward presence and crisis response operations. Therefore, included is a study of the concerns and friction associated with these operations. Naval Forces offer the solution to an amazingly wide range of crises and conflicts.

# **NAVAL FORCES: VALUABLE BEYOND THE SUM OF THEIR PARTS**

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Naval expeditionary forces will continue to play an integral role in United States' military strategy. Naval forces offer flexibility, unobtrusive forward presence, and power projection due to their expeditionary nature. Most importantly, they may be the first option that is both available and capable of responding to a crisis. Secure ports and airfields will not always be available as they were in Operation DESERT SHIELD. Naval forces provide a level of strategic and operational flexibility that make them valuable beyond the sum of their parts. In essence, they carry war fighters, nation builders, peacekeepers, and disaster relief assistants as they operate freely along the world's littorals. It is their ability to effectively respond to an extremely wide range of sea, land, and air operations across the entire continuum of conflict that sets them apart from other services.

Our National Military Strategy currently stresses forward presence and crisis response while at the same time we are reducing forces and overseas bases. This tension will undoubtedly cause an increase in the selection of mobile and rapidly deployable naval forces as the force of choice in times of crisis. Forward presence and crisis response operations are often successful, but they also present significant risks that must be accounted for.

The world today is going through a period of change. Ethnic and cultural strife, hunger, proliferation of modern weapons, and competition for scarce resources or local

hegemony are creating conflicts and flashpoints in virtually every region. Jane's Defense Weekly lists 73 current flashpoints.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, 55 of those 73 flashpoints are along the world's littoral and thus directly susceptible to naval force operations. The United States' ability to deter or quickly respond to a crisis, however, is steadily declining due to fewer forces based overseas. "In 1946, the U.S. funded 450 overseas bases; today that number is below 120..."<sup>2</sup> That trend is likely to continue, further reducing our forward presence. More and more conditions or "strings" are being attached to our use of overseas bases and facilities. Gaining overflight approval from foreign governments cannot be relied upon. The irony of all this is that the demise of the world's bipolar structure has fostered our retreat while at the same time opening the door for many of today's conflicts and increased regional uncertainty.

Warfighting CINCs do have, however, a force available that can offset many of the problems stated above. Forward deployed Navy and Marine Corps forces are "... capable of a full range of action -- from port visits and humanitarian relief to major offensive operations."<sup>3</sup> Navy and Marine Corps forces are naval forces that are expeditionary in nature. Expeditionary means that they are swift to respond, structured to build power from the sea, able to sustain support for long term operations, and unrestricted by the need for transit or overflight approval.

Numerous recent events have illustrated the utility and value of forward deployed naval expeditionary forces. Since 1990 they have participated in evacuation operations in Liberia and Somalia, humanitarian operations in the Philippines and Bangladesh, a combined humanitarian and interpositioning operation in Northern Iraq, conducted

amphibious raids and demonstrations in Kuwait, were prepared to conduct a major amphibious assault in Kuwait, conducted sea control, maritime interdiction, and strikes in the Kuwait Theater of Operations, are again involved in a humanitarian and peacekeeping operation in Somalia, and continue to stand ready for involvement with Haitian refugees, the Balkans and Iraq.

Naval expeditionary forces will continue to be the force of choice in future crises because of the strategic and operational capabilities that they offer to the National Command Authorities and the warfighting CINCs. These capabilities stem from their expeditionary nature. Chapter II will take a deeper look at the four roots of naval force capabilities.

## CHAPTER II

### STRENGTHS AND CAPABILITIES

Naval forces gain their capabilities through their expeditionary nature. This chapter will examine the four components of this expeditionary nature. The four components are mutually supportive and produce a synergistic effect that results in the increased flexibility and value that naval forces offer.

Swift to Respond to a Distant Crisis. Naval forces are forward deployed overseas. They can quickly move to areas of tension. Other than small, light fly-in forces such as special operation or elements of the 82 Airborne, naval units will usually be the first forces that are capable of arriving on the scene. The 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) embarked aboard ships of Amphibious Squadron 5, along with the USS Independence and USS Eisenhower carrier battle groups had arrived in and were operating in the North Arabian Sea by 7 August 1990. These naval forces joined the eight ship Joint Task Force Middle East squadron which was already forward deployed in the Persian Gulf.<sup>1</sup> Additional naval forces, including the 4th Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB), embarked aboard ships of Amphibious Group 2, arrived on-scene by early September and represented the United States' "only forcible entry capability."<sup>2</sup>

Structured to Build Power From the Sea. Naval forces do more than just arrive quickly. They bring all of their combat power with them. They are organized and equipped with the personnel, assets, and a mix of capabilities to execute a wide range of missions.



The operations that naval forces conducted from Africa to Bangladesh during the DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM time-frame truly illustrate this range. The U.S. Navy ultimately deployed "more than 165 ships ... to the Persian Gulf, Arabian, Red, and Mediterranean Seas."<sup>3</sup> For ease of clarity, I'll refer to the naval forces as either Marine Forces Afloat (MFA)<sup>4</sup> or surface forces. The MFA were embarked aboard amphibious ships and represented our amphibious forcible entry capability. The surface forces were the remainder of our surface combatants and support ships.

The MFA initially consisted of the 13th MEU, and grew with the arrival of first, the 4th MEB and then the 5th MEB embarked aboard ships of Amphibious Group 3. The total MFA numbered 17,800 Marines embarked in 31 amphibious ships. They were equipped with 39 tanks, 96 mobile TOW antitank missile systems, 112 assault amphibian vehicles, 52 Light Armed Vehicles, 52 artillery pieces, 63 attack aircraft, and six infantry battalions.<sup>5</sup> They represented "the largest landing force since the Korean War."<sup>6</sup> Between September 1990 and May 1991 various elements of these Marine Forces Afloat participated in a dizzying array of operations as highlighted below.

The 13th MEU and a special purpose force from the 4th MEB participated in maritime interdiction operations to enforce the U.N. imposed trade embargo of Iraq.<sup>7</sup>

The MFA conducted numerous amphibious assault exercises in Oman and Saudi Arabia from September 1990 to January 1991. Ultimately, those rehearsals played a critical role in General Schwarzkopf's operational deception efforts. "The Iraqis positioned up to six divisions within reach of the coast ..." and expended much of their engineering effort in constructing elaborate beach defenses against an attack that would never occur.

Elements of the 4th MEB conducted Operation EASTERN EXIT, a noncombatant evacuation operation (NEO) in Somalia in early January 1991. Two amphibious ships were quickly ordered to Somalia in response to a request for immediate support from the American Ambassador in Mogadishu. Due to the rapidly deteriorating situation, two CH-53E helicopters with a 60-man Navy-Marine security team launched from the USS Trenton while still 460 miles from the city. The helicopters were refueled while in-flight, and evacuated over 280 people, including eight Ambassadors, to the American ships.<sup>9</sup>

On 29 January, elements of the 13th MEU conducted "Operation DESERT STING, a company-size heliborne amphibious raid on Umm Al Maradim Island.<sup>10</sup> The island is located less than 15 miles off the southern Kuwaiti coast and no doubt contributed to Iraqi fears concerning an impending amphibious assault.

On 20 February, U.S. Marine AV-8B Harrier attack planes conducted the first American air strikes from an amphibious assault ship, the USS Nassau (LHA-4).<sup>11</sup> The strikes were continued for the rest of the war. "Each day, Harrier availability was reported to the carrier battle force, which relayed it to the joint force air component commander in Riyadh. Daily air missions were then reflected in the air tasking order."<sup>12</sup>

On 24 February the 5th MEB conducted a battalion size helicopter-borne assault near the Al Wafrah oil field complex in southern Kuwait.<sup>13</sup> The purpose of this assault was to guard the 1st Marine Division's right flank as it attacked through the Iraqi minefield belts.

On 25 February the 4th MEB conducted demonstrations at Ash Shuaybah, Kuwait, and at Bubiyan and Faylaka Islands in order to keep Iraqi attention focused toward the sea.<sup>14</sup>

Throughout the ground campaign, elements of 5th MEB also screened the 2d Marine Division's left flank, "... provided supply route security, and handled more than 3,000 enemy prisoners of war."<sup>15</sup>

Later in March, the 5th MEB was alerted to prepare to conduct a NEO in Ethiopia. A need for an actual evacuation never materialized, so the 5th MEB eventually sailed home for California. But on the way home, the MEB was diverted to Bangladesh.<sup>16</sup> Disaster relief was urgently required due to a typhoon which killed 150,000 people and left another 1.5 million in need of food, shelter, and medical aide. Over a nine day period the 5th MEB, along with other multinational civilian and military organizations, provided medical and dental support, purified water, and delivered 700,000 pounds of supplies to 1.7 million people in a 9,000 square mile area during Operation SEA ANGEL.<sup>17</sup>

Naval surface forces in the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea conducted sea control operations, maritime interception operations, offensive strikes, mine countermeasure operations, and provided naval gunfire support.

United States and coalition naval and air forces "... essentially destroyed the Iraqi Navy in three weeks."<sup>18</sup> Securing sea control prevented the Iraqis from laying additional sea mines and allowed coalition naval forces to operate further north in the Persian Gulf. Sea control also "... allowed the coalition to isolate Iraq from outside support."<sup>19</sup>

An extensive maritime interdiction operation was conducted throughout the DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM period in an effort to enforce United Nations Security Council Resolutions 661, which announced economic and trade sanctions,<sup>20</sup> and 665 which approved the use of "such measures" that "may be necessary" to enforce the sanctions.<sup>21</sup> Over 7,500 merchant ships were challenged with 964 boarded, and 51 diverted during this period by 165 ships from 19 coalition navies. It's been estimated that 95% of Iraq's pre-invasion revenues were cut off by the maritime interdiction operation.<sup>22</sup>

Six U.S. Navy aircraft carrier battle groups were formed into a Red Sea Battle Force and a Persian Gulf Battle Force with a total of 331 fighter and attack aircraft.<sup>23</sup> Naval aviation did not play a dominant role in the air war during Operation DESERT STORM. It essentially "pulled its weight," executing approximately 23% of all combat missions while comprising roughly 23% of all attack and/or fighter aircraft in the theater.<sup>24</sup> The Navy did experience some initial problems working with the JFACC and the ATO system. The Navy was slow to respond to joint warfare. "The U.S. Air Force had a staff of well over 1,000 to run the air campaign; we had a staff of 100 and no officer was assigned to the Joint Force Air Component Commander until commencement of hostilities."<sup>25</sup> The major problem with the ATO system was a "...lack of the computer-aided flight management system (CAFMS)--an electronic ATO transmission system" aboard Navy ships.<sup>26</sup> This necessitated having to fly the daily, 300 plus page ATOs from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia to the aircraft carriers. CAFMS is an Air Force system which was not "... fully interoperable with the other services."<sup>27</sup>

The Navy's Tomahawk (TLAM) missiles did prove to be extremely valuable. Not only were they "smart" weapons, they were "... the only weapon system used to attack central Baghdad in daylight."<sup>28</sup> Tomahawk missiles eliminate the risk of exposing personnel while at the same time providing the flexibility to attack critical targets at any time with the additional advantage of stand-off.

The Navy's aircraft carriers may not have played a dominant role in the actual air war, but their contribution was huge at the strategic and operational levels. The USS Independence and Eisenhower CVBGs were the first significant forces on the scene that could project air power against Saddam Hussein's forces in Kuwait. They kept the door open for U.S. Air Force, Army, and Marine Corps units to arrive. How much did the quick presence of these two CVBGs contribute to Saddam's decision not to cross into Saudi Arabia? According to Vice Admiral R.F. Dunn, USN (Ret.), it was precisely the CVBGs presence "... that undoubtedly deterred Saddam Hussein from aggression beyond Kuwait and encouraged the Saudis to permit land-based forces into their country."<sup>29</sup> We may never know the true answer as to whether Saddam definitely intended to continue south after his forces had consolidated and reorganized in Kuwait. What is apparent is that even if Saddam had intended to invade Saudi Arabia, the rapid, and possibly unexpected presence of U.S. Naval power on the scene added a new dimension to the conflict; the United States was becoming directly involved. Perhaps this caused Saddam to hesitate until it was too late.

Coalition naval forces gained sea control, but not of the Northern Persian Gulf. Once again, the U.S. Navy's dismal mine countermeasures capability became painfully

evident. Sea mines have been and will continue to pose a major threat. Rear Admiral Allen Smith, USN, was the commander of the amphibious task force which was to conduct an amphibious landing at Wonsan, Korea during the Korean conflict. The landing was canceled due to mines. Rear Admiral Smith summed up the situation quite appropriately by stating "we have lost control of the seas to a nation without a navy, using pre-World War I weapons, laid by vessels that were utilized at the time of the birth of Christ."<sup>30</sup>

Part of our problem with mines during the more recent Gulf War resulted from the five month "phoney" war period of Operation DESERT SHIELD. Coalition naval forces were prevented from operating further north than the 27° 30' north parallel in an effort to avoid provoking Iraqi military action.<sup>31</sup> During this period, when both sides built-up their forces practically in sight of each other, the Iraqis laid 1,167 mines in the Persian Gulf without any interference from Coalition naval forces.<sup>32</sup> Also troublesome was the fact that the Iraqis purposely set some mines adrift in the Gulf, to drift south and disrupt operations in the Southern Persian Gulf.<sup>33</sup>

The Iraqi sea minefields and their drifting mines had a severe impact on the Coalition's ability to carry out naval operations, especially in the Northern Persian Gulf. "Mines prevented the battleships USS Wisconsin (BB-64) and USS Missouri (BB-63) from maneuvering freely to provide gunfire support to forces ashore."<sup>34</sup> "Any prospect of the 17,000 embarked Marines storming ashore probably evaporated on 18 February, when mines disabled the Aegis cruiser USS Princeton (CG-59) and the amphibious assault ship USS Tripoli (LPH-10)."<sup>35</sup>

Admiral Isaac Kidd, USN (Ret.), once said that "minesweeping seems to acquire sex appeal once every 25 years. The intervening hiatus is quite a hurdle to overcome."<sup>36</sup> At the moment minesweeping is sexy. The Navy is moving towards a new focus of From the Sea and expects to operate near the coast lines. The Navy's mine warfare forces have been reorganized. It will be interesting to see, however, how long their allure lasts this time.

**Able to Sustain Support for Long-Term Operations.** "Ships at sea in remote areas of the world have healthy self-sufficiency. Naval forces can remain on station for extended periods. Amphibious forces remained off Liberia for seven months prior to executing a NEO during Operation SHARP EDGE. The USS Eisenhower task force remained in the Indian Ocean at sea for five months during the Iranian hostage crisis."<sup>37</sup> This healthy self-sufficiency is provided by a host of naval auxiliary ships. Underway replenishment ships provide direct support to forward deployed naval forces and supply fuel, ammunition, and other goods. Fleet support ships provide maintenance, towing, and salvage services.<sup>38</sup> The ability to loiter on station for extended periods provides strategic and operational flexibility to the National Command Authorities and warfighting CINCs, as well as tactical flexibility to the on-scene commander.

Additionally, naval forces can conduct lengthy ground operations without an immediate requirement for external logistic support. The 24th MEU, embarked aboard ships of Amphibious Squadron 8, was participating in a Mediterranean deployment when it was ordered to assist the Kurds in Northern Iraq in April, 1991. The MEU landed at Iskenderun, Turkey, and moved elements up to 450 miles inland to begin its participation in Operation PROVIDE COMFORT. The MEU spent three months in Northern Iraq,

delivering millions of tons of supplies to the homeless Kurd refugees and reestablishing security for the Kurds to return to their villages in Iraq. The MEU operated with joint and combined units during this humanitarian and interpositioning operation.<sup>39</sup> Also noteworthy in PROVIDE COMFORT was that the MEU's mobile service support group was required to provide support to other allied forces because they did not bring an organic logistic support capability with them, as is the case with our MEUs.<sup>40</sup>

**Transit and Overflight Approval is not Required.** Naval forces can legally transit all international seas without violating any nation's territorial rights. This is an unparalleled freedom of maneuver unavailable to land based air or ground forces. Contemplated moves cannot be stymied simply due to a failure to gain approval from unwilling foreign governments as occurred with our F-111s in Operation ELDORADO CANYON against Libya.<sup>41</sup> Security is also increased because eliminating the coordination and communication involved in gaining the approval lessens the chance that the planned action will be prematurely discovered. Forward presence and crisis response operations need not be hindered solely by a lack of overseas bases.

Combined together, the four capabilities discussed above provide an unparalleled degree of strategic and operational flexibility to our national decision makers. The strategic and operational ramifications of this flexibility are being witnessed today as forward deployed naval forces stand ready for the next crisis. The value of this flexibility will be explored in greater detail in Chapter III.



## **CHAPTER III**

### **FLEXIBILITY**

Strategic and operational flexibility may be the most significant contribution that naval forces provide to our national decision makers and operational commanders. Very few operations are even possible without naval forces. They can move freely and execute a wide range of operations. But just as significant is the reversibility of naval forces, which is another example of their flexibility. They can be quickly and safely withdrawn from a crisis. Ground forces may be difficult to withdraw. In fact, their physical presence or their actions may actually inflame a situation. Naval forces offer another option. They can be kept close-by if desired, but if the crisis is resolved they can simply steam away. The easily reversible nature of naval forces is another advantage to keep in mind. The remainder of this chapter will examine the strategic and operational flexibility offered by naval forces. B.H. Liddell Hart's axiom, "amphibious flexibility is the greatest strategic asset that a sea power possesses"<sup>1</sup> continues to grow and expand in relevance and meaning.

Liddell Hart's definition of amphibious flexibility was much more narrow than is ours today. Liddell Hart was primarily referring to the wartime strategic flexibility that a nation enjoys when it has the capability to conduct significant amphibious operations against a hostile enemy. Using the allied invasion of Europe in June 1944 as an example, he points out that nearly 45% of the entire German Army was retained away from the eastern front to either guard against the expected allied amphibious invasion (115 divisions), or to defend against the previously conducted amphibious invasion of Italy (18 divisions). But the Germans gained little for their efforts. The allies enjoyed the operational flexibility

to choose the location and the time of the landing, additional benefits of the flexibility that amphibious forces provide. Germany deployed 115 of their divisions, nearly 39% of their entire Army, from Norway to the Balkans in an effort to defend against the upcoming invasion. The result of having to defend "everywhere" left the Germans with only 32 of those 115 divisions in northern France, and most of those were not near the Normandy landing site. Thirty-two divisions are significant, but more importantly, 83 divisions, or nearly 28% of their entire Army was diverted well away from both the actual landing site, and from the eastern front due to the amphibious flexibility inherent with naval forces.<sup>2</sup>

Both Iraq in 1990-91, and Germany in 1944 were confronted with the same dilemma in that both had faced an enemy capable of executing a large-scale amphibious assault. But the similarity ends there. Iraq had a coastline of roughly 50 miles to defend in Kuwait, whereas Germany was threatened along virtually the entire coast of Europe from Norway to Greece, excluding Spain and Portugal. France itself had over 1,100 miles of coastline.

Both cases illustrate that the threat of an amphibious assault provides more value at the strategic and operational levels than at the tactical level. Germany and Iraq were compelled to tie up significant portions of their forces in an effort to defend against much smaller amphibious forces. The Germans devoted 18 divisions to Norway and Denmark, almost four times the size of the Normandy invasion force.<sup>3</sup> Iraqi forces along the Kuwaiti coast outnumbered the Coalition's amphibious assault force by six to one.

The strategic and operational value grows as the length of the assaultable coastline increases. A defender who tries to defend everywhere weakens his ability to be strong where required, the ultimate landing site. If he adopts the strategy of consolidating his

forces inland in order to react to wherever the assault occurs he creates other problems for himself. Moving his forces to the landing site makes them vulnerable to air strikes. How does he determine if the landing is the enemy's main effort or simply a deception? The Germans had that problem at Normandy. He loses the defender's advantages by having to attack the assault force vice meet it from behind strong defensive positions. He also gives the assault force time to build combat power, get organized, and move inland.

Iraq did not face those problems because they had a large enough force that they could afford to defend the small Kuwaiti coast without adversely weakening their defenses elsewhere. But the fact remains that even in this case Iraq tied up large forces and expended considerable effort due to the amphibious threat. Additionally, if Saddam had decided to establish defensive positions further west along the Iraqi Saudi border, he would have had to choose between weakening the coast defenses, or weakening his inland defenses by stretching them to cover longer fronts.

General MacArthur's amphibious assault at Inchon, South Korea is another example of the strategic value of amphibious forces. His landing deep behind enemy forces unhinged the North Korean invasion with an amphibious assault force of two understrength divisions.<sup>4</sup> General MacArthur's operational stroke had a direct impact on securing strategic goals that were well out of proportion to the size of the amphibious force involved.

Amphibious forces confront the enemy with dilemmas that pay off their highest dividends at the strategic and operational levels. The Germans placed almost 30% of their forces in areas that were never attacked. Iraq also expended considerable forces, time, and

effort to ward off a relatively small amphibious force. The North Koreans failed to defend at all against an amphibious assault and therefore paid a heavy price.

Liddell Hart pointed out that the strategic and operational value of amphibious forces may diminish after they are landed.<sup>5</sup> His thrust was that once landed, the enemy can concentrate on them and no longer has to be distracted by a threat along the entire coast. In other words, the dividends may or may not be significant at the tactical level once the force is landed. Liddell Hart pointed out that 22 understrength German divisions were able to hold off 30 Allied divisions in Italy.<sup>6</sup> If the Marines had actually landed in Kuwait they may have succeeded, or may have been wiped out; no one will ever know. General MacArthur's two divisions that landed at Inchon ultimately fought against smaller numbers of North Koreans at Seoul and although victorious, suffered significant casualties in protracted street fighting.<sup>7</sup>

Competent operational art, however, can impact advantageously on tactical success. The invasion of Tinian during World War II is a good example. The Japanese concentrated nearly all of their 9,000 personnel and resources to defend the two most likely landing beaches which were near Tinian Town. The Marines conducted feints near those beaches but executed the actual landing at the opposite end of the island on a much less favorable beach that was only 125 yards wide. Complete surprise was achieved and the island was quickly controlled with light casualties.<sup>8</sup>

In the Falklands conflict, the British relearned the hard way about the strategic and operational flexibility offered by naval expeditionary forces. A mistake that the United States should take to heart. "Back in 1966, the British Defense Minister declared that

British armed forces would never again have to face another opposed landing, and never have to operate on their own."<sup>9</sup> This decision was based on the two part premise that future unilateral operations outside of the NATO area would never again be required, and that such operations would simply be unfeasible in any event since the government had decided not to retain large-deck aircraft carriers in their fleet.<sup>10</sup> Sixteen years later found Britain rushing off to execute the exact type of operation that they had previously determined to be both unnecessary and unfeasible. The fact that they were able to succeed was due as much to Argentinean timing as to British military professionalism and capability. Britain was in the process of deactivating or selling 25% of their surface combatants, to include their two amphibious assault ships, HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid, and the ski-ramp equipped light aircraft carrier (CVSG) HMS Invincible.<sup>11</sup> The key question is what military options would Britain have had available if Argentina had simply delayed their invasion of the Falklands until after the British had emasculated their fleet? As it was the British amphibious task force, which did include the three ships listed above, won a decisive victory; but it was a close thing which could have easily gone the other way.

Britain discovered first hand the relevance of Admiral Hayward's statement that future conflicts will be "come as you are affairs."<sup>12</sup> The United States is likely to be faced with the same problem in future crises. The United States, however, enjoys the distinct advantage of currently having on-hand a large, modern, and flexible naval expeditionary force capable of responding to a multitude of missions. Secure ports and airfields may not

always be available as they were in DESERT SHIELD. Retaining our amphibious forcible entry capability confronts the enemy with a dilemma while it expands our options.

The expeditionary nature and inherent flexibility of naval forces produce a synergistic effect in both their capabilities and the options they offer to national decision makers. This is so because naval forces by themselves, enjoy to a large degree the advantages that normally accrue only from jointness. This is in no way an attempt to belittle joint operations. It is simply a realization that naval forces alone have the ability to carry out extensive sea, land, and air operations that other services can not emulate on their own. Joint operations are not to be shunned, however. They increase our strengths and options. They can also assist in minimizing the limitations that naval forces have. Minimizing limitations is always crucial in order to maximize strengths. Chapter IV will examine those limitations.

## CHAPTER IV

### LIMITATIONS AND CONCERNS

Naval forces offer significant strengths and flexibility but they also have certain limitations which must be considered. There are limits to the types and amount of combat power that they can generate. Their ability to influence events on inland areas may be minimal at times. This chapter will discuss these problems and offer some possible solutions to them.

Limits to Combat Power. The amount and types of combat power that naval forces can generate must be examined in two ways: the make-up or organization of the naval force, and the enemy threat that confronts it. Forward deployed naval forces have traditionally been the three to five ship amphibious ready group (ARG), and the eight to ten ship carrier battle group (CVBG). Both often operate independently. An ARG with its embarked MEU of roughly 1,800 Marines is capable of limited combat actions but will become overmatched by a significant threat. ARGs have proven to be more than adequate to conduct raids or evacuations. But an ARG would certainly not have offered a serious threat to the Iraqis in Kuwait in the fall of 1990. An ARG also lacks significant strike, anti-air, anti-surface and anti-subsurface capabilities unless a CVBG is nearby. Carrier battle groups, on the other hand, can generate awesome combat power against land, surface, air, and subsurface threats, and can do so at an engagement rate that is unlikely to be overcome by Third World opponents.<sup>1</sup> But CVBGs have no ground combat force to project on land unless an ARG is conveniently in the area. Combining ARGs and CVBGs solve the problems but limit the amount of area that can be covered by the deployed force.

The challenge is to beat these limitations in order to expand forward presence and crisis response capabilities while we simultaneously face force reductions and the closure of overseas bases. The naval services are responding with a number of alternative options. Maritime action groups (MAG), and special purpose Marine air-ground task forces (SPMAGTF) are two examples.

A MAG can be tailored to fit the situation. During a recent deployment to the Mediterranean Sea the 6th Fleet operated with a MAG that consisted of a "....Ticonderoga (CG-47) class cruiser, an Oliver Hazard Perry (FFG-7) class frigate, a Los Angeles (SSN-688) class submarine, and a P-3C Orion patrol aircraft."<sup>2</sup> The actual make-up, however, can be varied as the situation dictates. A MAG is capable of responding to numerous threats for which a CVBG is not required. They provide another means for our shrinking Navy to carry out forward presence missions in one area while a CVBG patrols another area. Maritime Action Groups are less capable against air threats than CVBGs,<sup>3</sup> and have no offensive air capability or ground combat units. This may be minimized if either joint or combined air or ground forces are available to work with the MAG.

Experiments are also underway with the deployment of SPMAGTFs embarked aboard aircraft carriers. The USS Roosevelt (CVN-71) has recently conducted exercises with an embarked 600 Marine SPMAGTF.<sup>4</sup> The Marines are helicopter-borne and can conduct a range of missions such as NEOs, raids, and boarding ships during maritime interdiction operations, thus extending the carrier's capabilities both ashore and afloat.

Numerous combinations of naval forces can be created. Two or more CVBGs can combine to form a carrier battle force. An ARG, a MAG, and a CVBG with a SPMAGTF



can each be assigned to dispersed locations in order to extend and expand our forward presence and crisis response capabilities. Any combination of the three can be quickly consolidated to project greater combat power.

An ARG combined with a CVBG and/or a MAG creates a synergistic effect. The ARG's MEU can be projected ashore to gain more direct control of a land area or locate and destroy stubborn antiship or antiair weapons. The MEU can receive supporting fires or strikes from the naval force which multiplies the combat power of the MEU out of proportion to its actual size and capabilities. The MEU, supported by a CVBG or MAG, can act as the initial building block for larger follow-on forces whether they be Army airborne, or an amphibious or maritime prepositioned force (MPF) MEB. Our MPF squadrons have been absent to this point in our discussion due to a desire to concentrate on forward deployed naval forces. But their value should not be underestimated.

The MPF concept proved its worth during Operation DESERT SHIELD. The 1st and 7th MEBs flew their personnel to Saudi Arabia, married up with their MPF ships, unloaded their equipment, and were operating in the dessert prior to the arrival of heavy Army units. Likewise, the amphibious 4th MEB was also on the scene prior to the arrival of the Army's heavy units. Together, these three MEBs and the 13th MEU represented a reinforced Marine division with two tank battalions, five mechanized infantry battalions, an engineer battalion, an artillery regiment, two Light Armored Vehicle battalions, one helicopter-borne infantry battalion, two infantry battalions, and a force service support group with 60 days worth of supplies. MEBs, either amphibious or MPF, provide fast and heavy reinforcement. This is a critical advantage for operational commanders.

**Power Projection to Inland Areas.** Another concern is the ability of naval forces to influence events in areas that are located significantly inland from a coast. A MEU's air combat element consists of a composite squadron that usually includes only four to six CH53 air refuelable helicopters. The remaining helicopters are not air refuelable. This will severely limit the build-up of Marine ground forces to deep inland areas. Navy and Marine fixed wing aircraft are air refuelable but carrier-based tankers (S3, KA-6) carry limited amounts of fuel to provide as compared to Air Force tankers (KC-135, KC-10). The flight profile, strike package, and bomb load may restrict one-way carrier to target distances to the 350-500 mile range unless Air Force tankers are available.

Nevertheless, the reach that naval forces can achieve is significant as our recent strikes against Baghdad clearly illustrate. Tomahawk missiles provide a healthy reach of their own. And as seen previously, the 24th MEU operated over 450 miles inland to assist the Kurds during Operation PROVIDE COMFORT.

It must be kept in mind that other services will also have difficulties generating combat power to a deep inland location. Army airborne forces can be flown to air drop sites virtually anywhere in the world. But they will quickly require sustainment and will lack mobility and firepower once on the ground. There is a limit to the distance that any service can effectively project power from forward bases. So the problem is bigger than a naval one alone. In all likelihood, the synergism gained from joint operations will be required for an effective response. For example, naval forces may be required to initially secure a port or an airfield to establish a forward base for heavier Army and Air Force units to operate from prior to the push inland.

As is true with any military force, naval forces have inherent limitations. But it's also true that these can often be overcome through various employment options or through joint or combined operations. Effective solutions can always be found. This brings us to our next concern. Our naval forces will see their role increase in forward presence and crisis response missions. Although often effective, these missions do have a down side. Effective solutions will have to be found for those also. Chapter V will discuss the down side of crisis response and forward presence.

## CHAPTER V

### THE DOWNSIDE OF FORWARD PRESENCE AND CRISIS RESPONSE

The purpose of this chapter is to consider the pitfalls and dangers involved in forward presence and crisis response operations. Focusing on these operations is necessary in this paper because naval forces will most often be tasked to carry them out. Forward presence and crisis response are two of the four foundations of our current military strategy at a time of force reductions and the closure of overseas bases. Additionally, the world is becoming more unstable. As has often occurred in the past, operational commanders will be faced with crises requiring both rapid planning and rapid execution.

This chapter is not an indictment of naval force limitations in carrying out these missions. On the contrary, naval forces are often the best choice. Naval forces have traditionally been the force of choice by decision makers to either respond to a crisis or to act in a deterrence role. Dr. Barry M. Blechman noted in one study that naval forces were involved in 177 out of 215 such incidents from 1945 to 1976.<sup>1</sup> Naval forces were selected so often precisely because of their inherent advantages and flexibility. Numerous variables will cause friction in crisis response operations. The remainder of this chapter will focus on four areas of concern that operational commanders must be prepared for.

First, are naval forces the most effective forces to use? Dr. Blechman argued that a naval force demonstrates a smaller "... political commitment and thus less effectively signals U.S. resolve and seriousness."<sup>2</sup> He further pointed out that the actual deployment of ground forces or ground based air forces were often more effective in achieving long term U.S. objectives because of the firm commitment that their physical presence

represented.<sup>3</sup> Or to phrase it another way, an infantry company on patrol throughout a village may be worth more than a CVBG floating off the coast. But the merits of employing ground forces, ground-based air forces or naval forces will have to be evaluated in each case. Naval forces, properly employed, have often proven to be highly effective in crisis response operations. And they are usually the only force capable of executing the mission. The Saigon evacuation operation in April 1975 is a good example. What force, other than naval forces could have conducted that operation? Operation ELDORADO CANYON was unquestionably best carried out by a joint naval and ground based air strike than by a commitment of forces ashore in Libya. In another example, President Carter achieved his purpose with a naval show of force. Partly as a result of a war of words between President Carter and Ugandan President Idi Amin Dada in February 1977, the Ugandan president ordered all 300 Americans in Uganda to report to the capital and forbade them from leaving the country. President Carter responded with strong warnings backed by the USS Eisenhower CVBG which was ordered to the East African coast.<sup>4</sup> Idi Amin continued to bluster but lifted the ban and canceled the meeting.<sup>5</sup> No shots were fired; it appears that forward presence and resolve worked in this case without deploying forces ashore.

Second, deterrence or crisis response operations can backfire. Positioning a naval force, or any force, close to the scene of a crisis in an attempt to defuse a situation may actually inflame it. In 1940 President Roosevelt "ordered the fleet retained at Hawaii as a deterrent to Japanese expansion in Asia."<sup>6</sup> The Japanese decided to expand anyway and simply saw our fleet at Pearl Harbor as a lucrative and exposed target which if severely

damaged, might induce us to sue for peace. The deterrent ploy failed but the "dastardly" surprise attack galvanized America as no other event could have done.

President Reagan ordered U.S. forces to land in Beirut, Lebanon in August 1982 in response to a request from Saudi Arabia and Syria to assist in the safe withdrawal of the PLO.<sup>7</sup> Our forces were initially welcomed but this did not last. Eventually they became targets. The Marines stayed in Beirut until February, 1984.<sup>8</sup> During this period U.S. forces suffered 266 killed, 160 wounded, and one prisoner of war while accomplishing nothing except a further loss of influence and prestige in the area.<sup>9</sup> It must also be pointed out that contrary to Dr. Blechman's argument, the actual landing of ground forces, strikes, and naval gunfire did not secure U.S. objectives in this case.

The above examples notwithstanding crisis response or deterrent operations seem to have a fairly good record, but are not a sure thing. James Cable in his book Gunboat Diplomacy 1919-1979 analyzed 72 separate incidents in which the United States conducted deterrent or crisis response type missions with naval forces between 1919 and 1979. The United States was successful in 49 cases, or 68%, unsuccessful in 14 cases or 19%, and the issue was undetermined in the remaining nine cases or 13%.<sup>10</sup> Determining actual success or failure in this area is difficult.

Third, operational commanders must be prepared for the enemy's response to our own actions. As the Pearl Harbor and Beirut cases illustrate, the enemy has a will of his own. He may not be impressed by our actions. What then?

The crisis that got us there may continue to smolder, die out, or become inflamed. Should we land the Marines upon arrival, wait patiently off the coast, or conduct air

strikes? Are plans required to conduct an NEO? What are the possible consequences of any of our actions? Will our enemy gain allies? Will we? Will public and world opinion effect our actions? Are we prepared to deal with those consequences? Can the on-scene naval force be reinforced, if necessary, and if so, how and when? If the Marines are landed can they be withdrawn if necessary? On-scene commanders will have to think ahead and plan for numerous options.

Fourth, they may also need to be prepared to answer countless questions from the CINC, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and possibly even from the National Command Authorities. Vice Admiral Metcalf, the commander of Joint Task Force 120 during the Grenada rescue Operation URGENT FURY states that he "spent almost half of my time dealing with higher authority."<sup>11</sup> Admiral Metcalf goes on to point out that his intention was to keep higher headquarters so well informed that they would not drive the minute direction of the operation, an experience he had previously witnessed during the Saigon evacuation. He termed this phenomenon the "six thousand mile screwdriver."<sup>12</sup> Naturally no commander relishes having his boss hovering over his shoulder scrutinizing every move. But it's unrealistic to expect that the on-scene operational level commander will be given a blank check. Military response to a crisis is an event with grave political implications at the national and international level. How much was President Carter's political fate sealed by the disaster at Desert One during Operation EAGLE CLAW?

The amount of involvement from higher authorities is likely to be situation and personality dependent. But it is only proper that they will make the policy decisions and approve the strategy used. President Bush has been credited with being "... the best

wartime commander-in-chief since Franklin D. Roosevelt in World War II... who believed in sending enough troops to do the job and not tying the hands of the commander."<sup>13</sup> Conversely, President Carter's "forceful but militarily inexperienced"<sup>14</sup> national security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski has been criticized for his meddling in the planning of Operation EAGLE CLAW.

The concerns mentioned above represent a sample of the dangers and friction inherent in crisis response operations. Operational commanders will have to react quickly and will not have a free hand. Clear guidance as to the purpose of the operation may even be lacking. Rules of engagement will blend military with political considerations. Casualties may have to be absolutely avoided solely due to political considerations. Crisis response operations often tend to be much more political in nature than military. Operational commanders and the forces involved will have to keep these concerns in mind.



## **CHAPTER VI**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The expeditionary nature and inherent flexibility of naval forces enable them to conduct an amazingly wide range of sea, land, and air operations across the entire continuum of conflict. They provide forward presence and crisis response capabilities without the need for overseas bases or overflight and transit approval. They can loiter on station for extended periods and even sustain other forces during a crisis.

Naval amphibious forces present an enemy with a very thorny dilemma. They distract an enemy and cause him to commit considerable resources and forces in an attempt to defend against the sea-based threat. An examination of history dating from World War II reveals that the land-based defender seldom gains from his efforts, and that naval forces pay off their largest dividends at the strategic and operational levels.

Naval forces do have limitations. But these can often be overcome with various employment options or by joint or combined operations. Understanding the limitations and accounting for them are the keys to successful employment of naval forces.

The U.S. National Military Strategy currently emphasizes forward presence and crisis response at a time of force reductions and the closure of overseas bases. These factors will have a direct impact on the naval forces. Similar to limitations, the down side of forward presence and crisis response operations can be minimized by understanding and planning for the dangers involved with these operations.

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